

132
The Office of a Deacon.

A DISCOURSE

PRONOUNCED ON OCCASION OF THE

ORDINATION OF MR. J. M. CURTISS,

TO THE

First Grade in the Apostolic Order of the Ministry,

John
IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, LOUISVILLE,

UPON FRIDAY MORNING, MAY 23, 1856,

BY DAVID C. PAGE, D. D.

Louisville, Ky.

"I knew it long ere now,
Yet am I not afraid;
The God to whom I pledged my vow,
Will surely send his aid.
At cost of all I have,
At cost of life and limb,
I cling to God who yet shall save,
I will not turn from Him."

LYRA GERMANICA.

LOUISVILLE:

S. RINGGOLD, CHURCH BOOK STORE.

HULL AND BROTHER, PRINTERS.

1856.



TO THE
REV. J. M. CURTIS,

Principal of the Parochial School,

Of St. John's Parish, Louisville,

The following DISCOURSE delivered on occasion of his admission to the order of DEACONS, is most affectionately inscribed by the author, in token of his high respect for the "simplicity and godly sincerity," and for the more than mediocre talents which so clearly augur, under Heaven's blessing, his signal efficiency and usefulness, whether in the LOWER or the HIGHER MINISTRIES of the CHURCH.

General order 95 Feb 1871

CORRESPONDENCE.

Louisville, Ky., May 26th, 1956.

THE REV. DAVID C. PAGE, D. D:

Rev. and Dear Sir.—The undersigned having enjoyed the pleasure and advantage of listening to your very able and impressive discourse, delivered on the occasion of the recent ordination in St. John's Church, respectfully request that you will furnish a copy of the same for publication.

We are, Rev. and Dear Sir,

Your faithful Friends,

and Fellow Servants, in CHRIST JESUS,

B. B. SMITH, Bishop of the Diocese,

G. P. SCHETKY, Rector of St. John's Church, Louisville,

F. H. BUSHNELL, Rector of Grace Church, Louisville,

J. SINGER WALLACE, Rector of St. Andrews' Church, Louisville,

J. M. GOSHORN, Rector of S. Paul's Church, New Albany, Ind.

JAS. RUNCIE, Rector of St. Paul's Church, Jeffersonville, Ind.

D. L. MILLER, St. John's Parish,

G. R. PENTON, St. John's Church,

JOHN S. ARNOLD, St. John's Parish,

S. RINGGOLD, Grace Church Parish,

R. L. TALBOT, St. John's Parish,

WM. INMAN, St. John's Parish,

JAS. P. ARNOLD, St. John's Parish,

E. W. CRITTENDEN, St. Paul's Parish,

WM. F. PETTET, St. Paul's Parish.

The Rev. Mr. Craik being absent from the city, and the Rev. Mr. Denison engaged in parochial duty, were prevented from attending on the occasion.

REPLY.

TO THE RT. REV. B. B. SMITH, D. D., Bishop of Kentucky, the Rev. G. P. Schetky and others of the Clergy, and to Mr. D. L. Miller, and W. F. Pettet and others of the Laity:

Rt. Rev. Father in God, and Beloved Brethren.—To be called upon by the Bishop of the Diocese, and by so many respected and beloved brethren both of the Clergy and the Laity, for the publication of the Discourse delivered by me at the recent ordination at St. John's, is a distinction certainly more flattering than I deserve, but it leaves me no alternative other than that of unhesitatingly placing the manuscript at your disposal, and of heartily thanking you for this most gratifying mark of your recognition of the claims of my sermon to be given to the world.

Meanwhile, Beloved Brethren,

I am most Respectfully and Affectionately

Your Faithful Friend and Servant,

for CHRIST'S sake,

DAVID C. PAGE.

Louisville, May 26th, 1856.

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S E R M O N.

“They that have used the office of a Deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.—*St. Paul's 1st Epistle to Timothy, 3rd c., 13th verse.*”

We are assembled my brethren, upon an occasion no less solemn and interesting than that of the ordination of the brother now before us to the sacred office of a Deacon, and did I feel myself at liberty to consult my own preferences merely, I should be a listener, and not the preacher of the day. But it having been thought good by our Bishop to assign this duty to me, I have no other alternative but to proceed as best I may, to its fulfilment; and in view of the peculiar nature of the office about to be conferred, have chosen the above very suggestive words, as the subject of my discourse. “They that have used the office of a Deacon well, have purchased to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” These I say, are the words which I propose to speak to now, and we may learn from them in the first place,

I. That THERE IS A DIVINELY INSTITUTED GRADATION IN THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY; for, says the Apostle, “they that have used the office of a Deacon well, have purchased to themselves a GOOD DEGREE.” And where, I might ask, where throughout the uni-

verse of God, where are there not degrees of authority, and differences of order, and gradations of rank? Of the economy of the heavenly state, but little is revealed to us, yet still we perceive manifold traces in Holy Scripture, of the existence of a Heavenly hierarchy. We read of a regular subordination among the Heavenly intelligences; of a succession of grades; of rank rising above rank, until the sublime images are presented to us of the High Archangel, of cherubim and seraphim, of thrones and dominions, of principalities and powers; and when we come down from that lofty elevation, to this, our earthly dwelling place, we find that into all associations which are organized for the attainment of common and public views, the idea of a gradation of offices, of a series of rank, necessarily enters. Such a constitution is inseparable from the idea of a regular army, of an established marine, of any association of men indeed, the attainment of whose objects depends in those who manage their affairs, upon a large experience, extensive knowledge, and consummate skill. Nay, whenever we think of an accomplished military commander, of a distinguished director of any department of civic and of social life, we picture to ourselves one who has diligently and patiently passed through the lower gradations of employment and distinction, and has thus become qualified by much study, and toil, and discipline, and self-denial, and submission to authority, for the illustrious station to which he has finally been exalted.

And so it has ever been in the Church of God. Under the ancient dispensation, there was the High Priest, the Priest and the Levite. In the aboriginal Christian

Church, there was our Saviour himself, the twelve Apostles, and the seventy Disciples; and after our Lord's ascension, there were the Apostles, and Elders, and Deacons, which offices have ever been continued, if not in all their circumstantial, yet in all their essential features, in uninterrupted succession from that time to this.

And there is a striking propriety, a divine wisdom in this economy; a propriety indeed, and wisdom, which is well expressed in the final collect in the office for the ordering of Deacons. "Make them, we beseech thee, O Lord, to be modest, humble, and constant in their ministrations, to have a ready will to observe all spiritual discipline, that they, having always the testimony of a good conscience, and continuing ever stable and strong in thy Son Christ, may so behave themselves in this inferior office, that they may be found worthy to be called unto the higher ministries of the Church." There is then a regular and most edifying subordination in the evangelic ministry, and the lowest grade, the first point in the ascending series, is the office of a Deacon. We will advert for a moment to the nature of this office as it is laid down in Holy Scripture, and in accordance therewith, in the ordinal of the church. We learn then from the Acts of the Apostles, that, in the early church, "when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples to them, and said: It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables, where-

fore, brethren, look ye out among you, seven men, of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the word; and the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the Apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." And we are told further on in the book, "that Philip one of the seven Deacons so appointed, went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them; and that when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God, they were baptized, both men and women."

Now, in accordance with this Scriptural statement of the origin and powers of the Diaconate, we are taught in the form and manner of ordaining Deacons; "that it appertaineth to the office of a Deacon in the church where he is appointed to serve, to assist the Priest in Divine Service, and especially when he ministereth the Holy Communion, and to help him in the distribution thereof, and to read the Holy Scriptures, and Homilies in the Church, and to instruct the youth in the Catechism; in the absence of the Priest, to baptize infants, and to preach, if he be admitted thereto, by the Bishop." And furthermore, it is his office, where provision is so made, to search for the sick, poor, and impotent people of the Parish, to intimate their estates, names, and place where they dwell, unto the curate, so that they may be relieved by the alms of parishioners and others.

Now, what I would have you observe, in view of these expressions of the ordinal is, that though from the great exigencies of the Church, in these United States, the functions of the Deacon are not strictly conformed to the primitive and apostolic model, (Deacons having hitherto been called to perform the duties of preaching, baptizing, and offering the devotional offices of the church,) yet, that according to its true theory, and for the most part as it would seem, its more primitive exercise, the Deacon's ministry is emphatically a MINISTRY OF MERCY. For of this sacred order it is here affirmed, to be the proper and peculiar province, to seek out objects of benevolence and charity; to visit the sick, to relieve the destitute, and to be the almoners of their more favored brethren, to the children of poverty and sorrow. And the time is coming, when, as I believe, the office of a Deacon shall revert to its original simplicity, and when there shall be associated with the Pastor of every considerable Parish, in the large cities especially, of our country, one or more Deacons, who shall fully carry out the original conception of the office, and thus afford the edifying and impressive exhibition of the three orders in their integrity; the visible and striking embodiment of the three-fold apostolic ministry. Meanwhile, it becomes those who are of the order of Deacons to continually bear in mind, the peculiar nature and prerogatives of their office, to remember that their mission is emphatically a MISSION OF MERCY, and that they are constituted by the form and manner, the explicit terms of their commission, the messengers of a pitying God, of a compassionate and merciful Saviour, to the needy

and suffering partakers of our common nature, to those of them in especial, "who are of the household of faith," and that they have a special call to the service of that crowning grace of the Holy Gospel, the grace of charity, and to pass into the church higher ministries, with the outstretched hand of relief, and the gentle words of heavenly consolation and peace.

And who does not see, that the office of a Deacon, were it duly carried out, is admirably adapted to cherish and to keep in vigorous action, those other cardinal graces of the gospel, modesty, humility, the spirit of subordination, and submission to lawful authority. The spirit of arrogance and presumption, a proud, aspiring, self-sufficient, self-righteous spirit, is natural to man, to the young man in especial, and therefore what a divine wisdom is there not in that, element in the church's constitution, which provides in the order of Deacons, a powerful check to these wayward propensities of our nature, by precluding an immediate and abrupt transition to the full and unlimited exercise of the ministerial office. The obvious tendency of such an arrangement, is, to foster a modest, humble, self-distrusting spirit, to suggest and to establish habits of self-discipline, self-control, and deference to authority. For what is the genius of the Deaconal office as it is delineated in the ordinal, and defined by the canonical provisions of the church? Why, it is emphatically a LIMITED and SUBORDINATE office. For it is an express canonical provision, that, Deacon's orders shall not be conferred upon any person, until he shall be one and twenty years of age, nor Priest's orders upon any one until he shall have attained to the age of four and

twenty. It is provided, moreover, that the Deacon shall be subject to the regulations of the Bishop, and that he shall officiate in such places as the Bishop shall dictate. The canons contemplate then, that a Deacon, if he be admitted to his order at the age of twenty-one, shall be subjected to probation of THREE YEARS, before his admission to the higher order of Priests; and during that interval, as it is provided in the ordinal, his official duties and prerogatives are to be entirely subordinate and auxiliary to those of the Priest, and with regard to the duty of teaching, in especial, it is expressly set forth in the ordinal, that he is to preach the gospel only if admitted thereto by the Bishop himself. Accordingly, my advice would be to the Deacons of the church, and it will be regarded perhaps, as being entitled to some degree of weight from my long and active ministry in the church's service, my advice, I say, would be to the Deacons of the church, that they should seek NO ABRIDGEMENT of the preparatory interval required by the canon, but that deeply thankful rather for the canonical restrictions imposed on them, they should devote the entire interval without a day's curtailment, to assiduous study, to fervent prayer, to meditation, and searching self-scrutiny, to works of charity and mercy, and to the OCCASIONAL, indeed, but not VERY FREQUENT exercise of the office of preaching; and that they should by no means be deterred from this course, by the fear of "hiding their talents in a napkin," or "burying them in the earth," or of "quenching the spirit," or of neglecting to "let their light shine," or to keep in action, real or imaginary gifts and graces. It is quite sufficient, to keep

down all such unpleasant misgivings, to remember, that Christ Jesus the Lord, the Great High Priest of our profession, did not enter upon the exercise of His public ministry until He had attained to the ripe age of thirty years, and that His great Apostle declares, "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a Bishop, he desireth a good work. A Bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient, not a brawler, not covetous, one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection, with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God; not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover, he must have a good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach, and into the snare of the devil." But a strict carrying out of the true genius of the Deaconal office, would tend to save a man from the evils here contemplated by the Apostle, and to superinduce that very spirit of humility, modesty, self-government, and submission to authority, which is universally regarded as the best preparation for being elevated to places of high trust, and of commanding influence.

And such a spirit is the best PREPARATION not only for such a position, but constitutes the best title to it also. Nothing great or good in life is to be acquired without capacity, without self-possession, without untiring vigilance, without patient and persevering toil, and without a careful observance of the recognized

proprieties, and conventional decencies of the social state. He who conducts himself with scrupulous fidelity and ability, in an inferior station, is surely better entitled to be promoted to posts of higher trust and distinction, than he who in the same station in life, has given no proof of capacity, done nothing positive and effective, or fallen culpably short it may be, of filling up the measure of his obligations. And hence, there is a peculiar and striking force in the words of the Apostle in the text, "they that have used the office of a Deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree."

But the Apostle further affirms in the words I am now speaking to, that "they who have used the office of a Deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree," not only, but "great boldness also in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." And this clause of the passage seems to admit of a two-fold interpretation. For it may mean, that those who thus behave themselves worthily in this inferior office, become in the vigorous language of the ordinal, stable and strong in the faith of Christ, and courageous and bold in the proclamation and defense of the truth, and this is a very good meaning, and very true to the spirit which is superinduced, by the worthily passing through the probation of the Deaconal office. Or it may mean that the disciplinary and preparatory exercises of the Deacon's office, such as the habit of mingling familiar counsels and exhortations, with the benefactions he administers to the sick and the poor, will, together with the systematic meditations and studies, which he is supposed to pursue, and the occasional exercise of the office of a public teacher, have the effect of giving him a promp-

itude of utterance, a readiness of thought and expression. And this, I am inclined to think, is the true meaning of the phrase in question, inasmuch as it is suggested in the FIRST place by the genius of the Deacon's office, and secondly, because as I would remind my Rt. Rev. Father, and my Rev. Brethren, whose studies have lain in this direction, the literal import of the Greek word as it is defined by the learned lexicographer, Schleusner, is liberty of speech, or liberty in speaking rather, and is applied to one who speaks in public, and delivers his sentiments on the subject which he is upon, with self-possession, WITHOUT TREPIDATION, WITHOUT HESITATION, and with REAL EFFECT. So that, the true import of the passage as it seems to me, is this, "they that have used the office of a Deacon well, secure to themselves a title to a higher office, a good degree,' and also will have attained to* a readiness of thought and expression suitable to the clearness and excellency of God's Holy Word.

And now my beloved friend and brother, what shall I say to you, in addition to what I have already said. Long and intimately associated as you have been with our Rev. Brother, the esteemed Rector of this Parish,† ever under his eye, guided by his counsel, and instructed and animated by his truly PASTORAL and EDIFYING EXAMPLE, I feel that it cannot be necessary, nay, that it would be unbecoming almost, in me, to dilate upon the awful responsibilities of the ministerial office. But there is one point to which I MAY be per-

*Πολλήν παρρησίαν ἐν πῶσι τῇ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

†Rev. G. P. Schetky.

mitted to call your attention upon this occasion, and that is, the PECULIAR TRIALS which are before you as one of the ministers of Christ's flock; nay it is a point which I feel, it may be highly profitable to dwell upon for a moment. I would say then, many and GRIEVOUS TRIALS you have before you, my brother. Of these trials you may have some conception indeed, but as yet, have had no experience. You must prepare yourself then, for those sufferings, not only of the mind and body which are common to all men, but for encountering MINISTERIAL AND PASTORAL TRIALS which in the first years of your ministry in especial, will press upon you with PECULIAR and MOST IRKSOME SEVERITY. These trials are of no less magnitude than the want of an adequate appreciation on the part of those to whom you minister, of the nature, the authority, and the practical import of "the ministry of reconciliation," a PROFOUND and at times an almost OVERWHELMING sense of the dread responsibilities of our trust, and of the INSUFFICIENCY OF ANY MORTAL MAN TO MEET ITS HIGH AND SACRED EXIGENCIES, a feeling in especial, of your inadequacy to unravel that tortuous web of sophistry in human hearts, which so often interposes fatal obstacles to the reception of "the truth as it is in Jesus," to adapt yourself in your public teachings, and in your private conferences, to all the varied phases under which the human character unfolds itself; and, as "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, to rightly divide the word of truth, and to give to each man his portion in due season." And not seldom my brother, will you have to deeply and bitterly deplore the apparent want of success, the painful fruitlessness of your

most continuous, laborious, and best directed efforts, the inexplicable indifference, the astounding insensibilities of many of your flock to the weightiest, the most solemn, and the most affecting verities. You will, sometimes be immeasurably astonished and profoundly humiliated by the consciousness of YOUR OWN unprofitableness and unworthiness, your infirmity of purpose, your devotional inaptitudes, the weakness of your faith, your backwardness to duty, and your strange insensibility to the claims of our compassionate and merciful Redeemer upon your heart's homage, and your life's devotions. But, be of good heart my brother, fear not, be not dismayed. "Greater is he that is for you, than he that is in the world," and all the perfections of his illimitable nature are pledged for the success, the support, the solace, and the FINAL TRIUMPH of His faithful ministers. With the Father of an infinite Majesty, the Eternal Source of light, and life, and joy, and power, with His adorable, true, and only Son, with the Holy Ghost, the comforter, with Angels and Ministers of Grace for your helpers and defenders, what have you to fear? To what toils, to what sacrifices, to what sufferings will you not be equal? What heights of saintly purity and devotion may you not attain to? What glorious conquests may you not win over the world, the devil, and the flesh? What signal success may you not hope for? What a radiant crown of celestial glory may you not aspire to? Yes, my beloved brother in Christ, many long years have passed away since a very young man, looking anxiously into the distant future, and not knowing what was before me in the developments of my ministerial

life, I stood before the altar of God, to receive at the hands of the venerable and now sainted White, the successive orders of Deacon and of Priest, and I now with a thankful and swelling heart declare, that Christ's glorious promise to be with His ministers always, has never failed me; that I have been refreshed in every toil, cheered and comforted in every sorrow, left not without many happy tokens of a successful ministry, and standing forth this day, a living monument of incomprehensible and wondrous grace, I rejoice in the felicity of setting this public and open seal to the truth of that declaration of the Psalmist, "Happy is the man who hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, who keepeth mercy and truth forever."

And now my beloved brother, in a few moments, the hands of the chief Pastor will have been laid upon your head; the vows of God will be upon you; and you will be invested with the HIGHEST DIGNITY WHICH CAN BE CONFERRED UPON MORTAL MAN, THE OFFICE OF A MINISTER OF CHRIST. How full of awful interest is not this hour. How fraught with the most thrilling associations of thought and feeling; unseen angels are in this assembly, the Blessed Paraclete, the Celestial Dove is waiting hither to descend, the Son of God, the High Priest of our profession, himself, THE FIRST in that illustrious line of Pastors and Teachers, with whom he has promised to be "always even to the end of the world," is looking down upon the transactions of this hour, with perceptions which he only can know. Thou vain false world, with all thy pomp and pagean-

try retire. Dare not with thy low trivialities, thy sordid cares, thy pitiful pretensions, thy ungenerous rivalries, thy vulgar aspirations, to intrude upon the awful solemnities, the heaven-descended glories of this hour. **BEGONE, AND LEAVE US ALONE WITH CHRIST AND WITH GOD.**

I.

Spirit of Christ, thine earnest given,
That these our prayers are heard, and they
Who grasp this hour the sword of heaven,
Shall feel thee on their weary way.

II.

Oft as at morn or soothing eve,
Over the Holy Fount they lean,
Then fading garlands freshly weave,
Or fan them with thine airs serene.

III.

Spirit of Light and Truth, to thee
We trust them in that musing hour.
Till they with open heart and free,
Teach all thy Word in all its power.

IV.

When foemen watch their tents by night,
And mists hang wide o'er moor and fell
Spirit of counsel, and of might,
Their pastoral warfare guide them well.

V.

And oh! when worn and tired they sigh,
With that more fearful war within,
When passion's storms are loud and high,
And brooding o'er remembered sin.

VI.

The heart lies down, O, mightiest then,
Come ever true, come ever near,
And wake their slumbering love again,
Spirit of God's most holy fear.

Now to God the Father, &c.